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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001467

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2015

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SUBJECT: FAUX-MDC CANDIDATES THROW HATS INTO SENATE RING

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

1. (C) At Monday's nomination court hearings, 26 individuals registered as MDC candidates for the Senate elections on November 26. As expected, MDC leaders in the three Matabeleland provinces went forward with contesting the election, accounting for 15 of the candidates. However, the other eleven candidates were not nominated by MDC provincial structures and appear to be opportunists seeking a Senatorial paycheck. MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai's call for a boycott appears therefore to have largely carried the day. ZANU-PF candidates were the sole nominees in 19 of the 50 districts and were thus declared victors by the Zimbabwean Election Commission (ZEC). End Summary.

&MDC Candidates8: Ndebeles and Has-Beens or Wanna Bes

2. (C) The fierce intra-party debate over participation in the Senate moved to another level on Monday when 26 individuals registered with the nomination court as MDC candidates. As expected, the provincial leaders in Bulawayo and Matabeleland North and South presented 5 candidates each. The other eleven candidates appear to have nominated themselves and represent a grab bag of minor party functionaries, failed candidates for past parliamentary elections, average Joes who appear to have come forward on a lark, and even some (former?) ZANU-PF members. In one case, the provincial chairman of Mashonaland East, his spokesman, and another provincial member registered for seats in Harare, undoubtedly hoping to capitalize on the party's urban strength and secure a Senatorial paycheck.

3. (C) An official with the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), a nonpartisan group that monitored the nomination courts, told post on Tuesday that the process for registering MDC candidates was confusing and subject to abuse. The MDC party structures, which in the past had vetted candidates, was absent in all but the Ndebele provinces. Suggesting the ad hoc nature of the nomination process, ZESN reported that one would-be MDC candidate was disqualified when he failed to produce any identification.

Tsvangirai Winning the Intra-Party Debate

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4. (C) Tsvangirai appears to have convinced nine of the twelve MDC party structures not to participate in the elections. Tsvangirai aide Ghandi Mudzingwa told us the MDC President was undaunted by the emergence of the 26 MDC candidates, including 11 outside of Matabeleland, whom Tsvangirai had dismissed as rogue elements. According to

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Mudzingwa, the opposition leader's strategy remained unchanged: he continues to campaign against the Senate, while telling his opponents within the party leadership that his door remains open should they choose to talk. (N.B. Post understands that respected academic Brian Raftopolous will mediate a meeting of the MDC's &top 68 as early as Thursday, which would mark their first confirmed meeting since October 12 when Tsvangirai overturned the Executive Council decision in favor of contesting.)

5. (C) Laying the groundwork for a boycott campaign in contested seats, Tsvangirai's spokesman on Tuesday distributed a statement from the MDC secretary for Harare province (emailed by post to AF/S) denouncing &political adventurers8 supporting the &ZANU-PF and CIO Senate project.8 The statement also called on Harare voters to reject &invaders8 who were &busse8 in from Mashonaland East,8 a reference to that province's MDC chairman and spokesman. Tsvangirai's aides have also painted the 26 candidates as not being the "real MDC" fueling speculation that they could be expelled.

ZANU-PF Expands Patronage Machine

16. (C) The ruling party put forward candidates in all 50 contested Senatorial seats (though without the usual party primary) a source of controversy within ZANU-PF that has been largely overshadowed by the MDC in-fighting). In 19 districts, the ZANU-PF candidate was the sole nominee and was duly declared Senator-elect by ZEC officials present at the courts. ZANU-PF largely put forward a list of political pensioners, many of whom are members of the old guard who lost in past elections. The ZANU-PF nominees confirm earlier assessments that the ruling party reinvented the Senate as a patronage machine. A variety of independents and third party members, chiefly also rans in past elections, also stepped forward to contest seats.

Gutu North By-Election: The Forgotten Race

17. (C) Amidst the fervor surrounding the Senate debate, the MDC and ZANU-PF nominated their candidates for the parliamentary by-election in Gutu North to replace late-Minister Tungamirai, who died in August. The opposition candidate is Crispa Musoni, who lost to Tungamirai in the last election. Meanwhile, the ruling party nominated businessman Lovemore Matuke, who came in second to Tungamirai in the ZANU-PF primary for the seat. Some war veterans have apparently questioned Musoni's credentials, but the ruling party has a long track record of by-election successes, largely the result of applying national resources to a local campaign and thus tilting the playing field even more in its favor.

Comment

18. (C) Tsvangirai appears to have largely carried the day. The MDC structures in nine of the party's 12 provinces sided with his boycott stance. Even in the three Ndebele provinces, it remains to be seen how deep the support for the decision to participate runs. That said, the next few weeks promise to be tricky for both Tsvangirai and his rivals in the MDC. The challenge for Tsvangirai will be how to campaign for a boycott without actually campaigning against MDC candidates. For his rivals, the challenges are even deeper. They need to demonstrate that they have a reason beyond self-interest for contesting the elections and will have to win without the support of the party or its charismatic leader.
DELL